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Jennifer Manning

Technological University Dublin, jennifer.manning@tudublin.ie

J. Miguel Imas

Kingston University, UK

Paul Donnelly

Technological University Dublin, paul.donnelly@tudublin.ie

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An Indigenous Women Perspective of Work and Organisation: The Maya Way¹

Jennifer Manning, Dublin Institute of Technology

J. Miguel Imas, Kingston University

Paul Donnelly, Dublin Institute of Technology



(Photograph: Jennifer Manning)

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Western literature in management/organisation studies focuses primarily on gender issues that affect inequalities experienced by women at work (e.g., Acker, 2006; Gatrell, Cooper and Kossek,, 2010). For example, the gap in salaries between women and men (e.g., Blau and Kahn, 2006, 2007; Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2003; International Trade Union Confederation, 2008), or the glass ceiling that affects women

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in the workplace (e.g., Barnet-Verzat & Wold, 2008; Bareto, Ryan and Schmitt, 2009; Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995; International Labour Office, 2004; Ragins, Townsend and Mattis, 1998; Smith, Caputi and Crittenden, 2012; Tharenou, 2005; US Department of Labor, 1991; Weyer, 2007). Adopting, in some cases, critical and feminist theoretical positions (e.g., Fondas, 1997), the gender debate unfolds questions on the prevailing male discourse that is dominant in management and business organisations. Most of these theoretical assumptions tend to influence, subsequently, the way in which we understand the experiences of women in the developing or under-developed world (even issues associated to women minority communities). That is, these theoretical positions occupy a privileged voice upon which to write, describe and analyse the experiences of women in contexts where these Western discourses seem either alien or simply do not apply. This raises important questions on how we come to understand, for instance, indigenous women organisations, from within the language and local cultural experience that these women have.

However important and relevant this literature is (critical and feminist), less has been said on how women, in the context of indigenous communities and organisations outside the dominant Western discourse of management/organisation, act and enact their organisation and working practices. Indeed, recent interest in postcolonial studies leaves open a window to address how indigenous women organise their work and their lives, challenging prevailing views on the subject. By postcolonial, we follow here Jack et al. (2011) who consider postcolonial theory a commitment to questioning the prevailing ontologies, epistemologies and methods of the academic centre in order to offer alternative ways of conceptualising organisation (studies) to neo-positivistic and neo-modernist perspectives. Equally, we consider Calás and Smircich's (2003, 2006) view that postcolonialism offers the ability to challenge organisation theorists' thinking regarding

the idea of progress in organisation studies, explaining that much of organisation theory, no matter how global, only represents the ways of thinking of certain people and not others. Spivak (1988) highlights a similar point in what she acknowledges as the problem of the muted subject, such as *the subaltern indigenous woman*, who inhabits the margins of Western feminist theorists and organisation theorists. Following these arguments, we think there is a need here to give voice to marginalised indigenous women, who are unrepresented in these debates (Imas and Weston, 2012). In this way, we certainly believe, we can start thinking of a truly plurivocal way of understanding and representing organisation (studies) that embraces discourses and practices from the periphery of the global (corporate/academic) centre.

Henceforth, our principal objective in this paper is to engage with indigenous women organisations in order to contribute to this debate from a postcolonial and local perspective to suggest alternatives to traditional views on the subject or feminist/critical assumptions that neglect these discourses. For this purpose, we have conducted critical ethnographic research (Walsh, 2007; Alcoff, 1991) with cooperatives in Guatemala. More specifically, we have engaged in dialogue with Maya co-operatives run by indigenous women in the Sololá Department of Guatemala. In the rest of the paper, we start with a review of feminist (organisational) theorising, transitioning to a discussion of the importance of a postcolonial critical feminist approach to organisation studies. We then describe our methodology and present our ethnographic work, which considers the issues raised in our theoretical discussion. We close the paper with some reflections on the significance our work has for organisation studies and the importance of incorporating the view of indigenous 'Third World women' to the field.

Decolonising Feminist and Global Organisation Studies

When it comes to mainstream concerns related to gender, issues surrounding the gender gap tend to come to the fore. In this regard, Lopez-Claros and Zahidi (2005, p.2) observe:

[T]he reality is that no country in the world, no matter how advanced, has achieved true gender equality, as measured by comparable decision- making power, equal opportunity for education and advancement, and equal participation and status in all walks of human endeavour. Gender disparities exist, even in countries without glaring male-domination.

Since then, the World Economic Forum has published an annual report on the global gender gap, with the latest report (Hausman et al., 2013, p.35) noting that, while there has been progress over the previous eight years, “[n]o country in the world has achieved gender equality”. The issue of the gender gap represents a concern of liberal feminism, which, while important, renders invisible other issues pertaining to gender being represented as a stable, transcultural and transhistorical concept, to gendering as a process embedded in relations of power, and to fluid and multiple genders rendered invisible or marginalised by relations of power.

In their comprehensive review of feminist (organisational) theorising, Calás and Smircich (2006) traverse liberal, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, poststructuralist/postmodern and transnational/postcolonial perspectives. Though these approaches display variety, they are nonetheless joined in both recognising and seeking to overcome “gendered dominance in social arrangements” (Calás and Smircich, 2006, p.286). They are all political in that, as critical discourses, they engage in critique of the status quo; however, they vary in their degree of critique and in the nature of their politics. From an organisation studies perspective, the questions they raise and the problems on which they focus shift from women’s access to, and work in, organisations, to the idea of organisational practices being gendered, to questioning ‘gender’,

‘indigenous’ and ‘organisation’ as stable analytical categories. Thus, the concern runs from seeking organisational reform, to organisational and societal transformation, to altering how we understand organisational knowledge, theory and practice.

How gender is understood represents a fundamental conceptual distinction among feminist theoretical perspectives. Liberal feminism, which represents early theory, concerned itself with inequality between males and females, that is, the sexes as categories of person denoted by biological characteristics. Over time, theorising moved to distinguishing between sex (as in biological categorisation) and gender, with the latter conceived as an effect of socialisation and experience. Notwithstanding the shift to gender, each theoretical perspective differs as to what counts in forming gender.

The focus of liberal feminism has been on ideas of equality and equity for women and it has been criticised for not moving the conversation beyond the view that “women are as good as men” (Calás and Smircich, 2006, p.290). When it comes to organisation studies, most scholarship consistent with a liberal feminist tendency can be classified as women-in-management. By and large, the concern is with the persistence of sex segregation in organisations and seeking to explain why it persists within what is assumed to be a neutral system. An overriding concern in the behaviour literature is with determining gender differences associated with such concepts as leadership (e.g., Eagly and Karau, 2002), job stress (e.g., Reitman and Schneer, 2003), job satisfaction (e.g., Burke, 2001) and organisational commitment (e.g., Singh and Vinnicombe, 2000), while the human resource management literature is concerned with gender differences in recruitment (e.g., Freeman, 2003), selection (e.g., Guthrie, Ash and Stevens, 2003), performance appraisal (e.g., Varma and Stroh, 2001), pay (Whitehouse, Zetlin and Earnshaw, 2001) and women acquiring human capital (e.g., Metz and Tharenou, 2001). Literature with a more structural focus largely addresses the issue of the glass ceiling (e.g.,

Powell and Butterfield, 2002; Tharenou, 2005), while literature focused on the intersection of the organisation with the broader social system addresses such issues as equal opportunity, affirmative action (e.g., Duncan and Loretto, 2004), sexual harassment (e.g., Firestone and Harris, 2003) and work/family (e.g., Perrons, 2003).

Conceiving of gender as a system of male domination, radical feminism is concerned with the social system that privileges the experience of men over women (Calás and Smircich, 2006). Seeing the personal as political, radical feminist research engages consciousness-raising to both interrogate women's experiences of patriarchal oppression and try to find ways to transcend it. For women of colour radical feminists, the experience of which women counts as representing gender was an additional concern, such that they adopt a less essentialist and more flexible view of gender. In terms of organisational scholarship, radical feminism has sought to detail and practice organising that negates both leadership and structure through creating forms that reflect feminist values and accord with the needs of women (e.g., Balka, 1997; Ferree and Martin, 1995; McBride, 2001).

The interest of psychoanalytic feminism is in connecting the individual's mind-world with her developmental experiences on the basis that "the fundamental explanation for women's way of acting is rooted deep in women's psyche, specifically, in women's way of thinking" (Tong, 1998, p.131). Organisational research following this tendency celebrates women's ways of knowing and doing, whereby women's differences are seen as contributing advantage to organisational effectiveness (e.g., Jelinek and Adler, 1988; Rosener, 1995).

The previous perspectives --- liberal, radical and psychoanalytic feminisms --- are more grounded in women's personal experience and in the ontological assumption that the oppression of women is situated in their condition. Their accounts of women's

subordination are focused on exploring what is distinctive about 'woman' as a universalised, transcultural and transhistorical human being (Calás and Smircich, 2006). Thus, they are concerned with issues of equality, similarity or difference, in so doing seeking to figure out how women and men can exist together, or separately, without subordination or oppression. With their focus on what is often referred to as 'women's issues', and no matter whether they speak to sameness or difference, these three theoretical perspectives are criticised for largely privileging the experience of white, Euro-American, middle class, heterosexual women, while largely ignoring the experiences of other women (Mohanty, 1988; Wood, 2001). When it comes to the women-in-management literature, it is further criticised for privileging the experience of an even narrower group of women, rendering the conditions of all other women in organisations invisible.

Turning now to socialist, poststructuralist/postmodern and transnational/postcolonial feminist theories, they complicate gender, seeing "gender(ing) as *social(ly) system(ic)* is a process, produced and reproduced through relations of power among differently positioned members of society, including relations emerging from historical processes, dominant discourses and institutions and dominant epistemological conceptualizations, all of which become naturalized as 'the way it is'" (Calás and Smircich, 2006, p.301). Thus, they begin with the conditions in which gendered identities and subjectivities are constructed: they engage analytically with the complexities of social, economic, cultural and knowledge systems with a view to denaturalising and critiquing their sustaining assumptions so as to rethink and change conditions.

For socialist feminism, the focus is on particular structural, historical material conditions and relations of power that are rooted in the process of gendering; thus, there is more to gender than the social construction of binary identity (Calás and Smircich,

2006). Given the concern of social feminism with relations of power and inequality, the workplace presents as a critical site for studying the production and reproduction of gender inequality as it reveals the connections between capitalism and patriarchy. Theorists coming from this perspective are also concerned with issues of epistemology, in terms of what is to be known, how knowledge is constituted, and for what end. Altogether, this tendency demonstrates the value of analytically combining human agency and social structure to explain on-going gender segregation and subjugation, all with the fundamental goal of both critiquing and transforming the social. Socialist feminist organisational scholarship explores the gendered division of labour and structuring of organisations, which serves to highlight that changing the organisational is about more than introducing more women. The interest is in uncovering the many ways in which organisation is continually structured along gendered lines (e.g., everyday procedures and decisions, symbols, images, ideologies, social interactions) and how this is reinforced and maintained by the gendered substructure of organisations. (e.g., practices that Acker [1994, p. 118] referred to as the “extracurricular reproduction of members”, such as the unpaid and invisible work of mothering [Griffith and Smith, 1987, 2005]).

Those coming from poststructural/postmodern and transnational/postcolonial perspectives problematise gender as fixed and homogenous; rather, they conceive of gender as fluid and multiple, thus, contested (Calás and Smircich, 2006). With the ‘linguistic turn’, and the concomitant move from language as simply representation to language as constitutive of the things we can know, poststructuralism views language as a system of signification that is at once plastic, indefinite similarly concerned with issues of language, representation, the undecidability of meaning, reflexivity, subjectivity and power (Calás and Smircich, 1999), postmodernism is marked by immanence, indeterminacy and discontinuity (Hasan, 1985) and as coalescing around an aversion to

modernity and its propensity for grand narratives, essentialism and the idea of totality (Clegg and Hardy, 1996, p.2). Thus, we move from a unitary notion of gender articulated in extant feminist work, to seeing gender as heterogeneous. Further, through questioning modern knowledge, poststructuralism/postmodernism affords feminist theorising a greater capacity for reflexivity. Of course, a limit of poststructuralism/postmodernism is that it offers no ground on which to stand, other than critical deconstruction. When it comes to organisation studies, feminist poststructuralism/postmodernism explores a number of related topics. Scholarship with an epistemological focus concerns itself with exposing practices associated with organising and with theorising same (e.g., Calás and Smircich, 1991, 1997, 2004). Other work seeks to challenge dualistic thinking, which represents another means through which knowing and performing gender and organising happens (e.g., Oseen, 1997; Höpfl, 2000; Baxter and Hughes, 2004). Work in the area of discourse studies practices that constitute gendered organisational subjectivities, along with resistance to such practices (e.g., Hodgson, 2003; Jorgenson, 2002).

In contesting Western feminist theorisations of gender, the transnational/postcolonial perspective views such theorisations as privileging the experiences of already privileged 'First World' women (and men) (Calás and Smircich, 2006). Transnational/postcolonial feminist theory contests the constructions of 'Third World' women in Western knowledge that represent them as uniformly lacking (e.g., development, education, knowledge, progress, wealth, agency, etc.). Thus, with gender no longer a stable analytic lens to be employed without problem across cultures and histories, transnational/postcolonial feminist theory gives voice to the marginalised and invisible 'others' to speak back and (re)claim their own agency, knowledge, capabilities, struggles, and strategies for survival. Nevertheless, these theoretical positions to a large extent remain non-existence in organisational scholarship.

Overall, in the eyes of most organisation literature (and we include here business and management, too, in any of its modernist or postmodernist materialisations), the voices of so called ‘Third World’ or ‘South’ women are cast within the knowledge tradition of the Western world. Indeed, we agree with Mohanty’s (1988, 1991) earlier thesis on this subject and upon which most (critical) feminist organisation studies build its argument: women from the South are still constructed as the ‘Other’. Mohanty argues that feminist writings discursively colonise the material and historical heterogeneities of women in the third world, thereby producing a singular ‘Third World woman’ - an image that appears arbitrarily constructed, but nevertheless carries with it the authorising signature of Western humanist discourse. Mohanty sustains that as a result of this systematic appropriation of the figure, identity and image of third world women, we end up with a truncated characterisation of these women that only emphasised their feminine gender (sexually constrained) and, obviously, being Third World (i.e., ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented, victimised, etc.) (Mohanty, 1988). This is further exacerbated by the kind of contribution they seem to make in organisation and management. Their contribution is portrayed as insignificant as they are seen as involved in the lesser working activities of production of raw materials, rather than the full involvement and contribution made at work by women in the so called First World. Indeed, under this conceptualisation we ought to ask ourselves whether then western feminist accounts can help to challenge these representations in organisation or management, inviting us to conceive these women not as oppressed or powerless but as true contributors to the well-being of work and organisation in their own localities and in their own terms.

Feminist theories which examine our cultural practices as ‘feudal residues’ or label us ‘traditional’, also portray us as politically immature women who need

to be versed and schooled in the ethos of western feminism. They need to be continually challenged. (Amos and Parmar, 1984, p.7)

More recently, Mohanty (2003) has remarked that by paying attention to and theorising the experiences of these communities of women and girls, we demystify capitalism as a system of debilitating sexism and racism, and envision anti-capitalist resistance that can contribute in the emancipatory representation of women of the third world. Equally, for organisation studies to engage with these women is to re-define our approach and recognise them not as the 'other' or inferior, uneducated females, but to bring forward their experiences and struggles in a way that foregrounds and nurtures their own understanding and comprehension of their organised existence.

Thus, what we attempt in this paper is to expose their struggle, their everydayness, in order to re-imagine a field that considers and respects a production of knowledge in which the agency of these women is celebrated. In the process of doing this, to provide readers with a productive and provocative space to think and act creatively for feminist struggle within and outside organisation studies. Paraphrasing Mohanty (2003), "the project to decolonise organisation requires re-crafting the under and the inside *homogenic*, oppressive globalised view of these women. Women of the Two-Thirds World (Esteva and Prakash, 1998) have always organised against the devastations of globalised capital, just as they have always historically organised anti-colonial and anti-racist movements. In this sense, they have always spoken for humanity as a whole (Mohanty, 2003). It is there why we ought to be prepared to engage with, allowing their contribution to our field of knowledge to be heard.

Critical Feminist Ethnography

In light of the research topic, and the postcolonial feminist theoretical framework, we adopt a reflexive critical ethnographic approach to engage with the organisational practices of indigenous women (e.g., Sandoval, 2000). The objective of our research is to highlight the organisational realities of marginalised indigenous women and provide a platform from which these women can voice how they act and enact their organisational and working practices. Ethnographic research provides the space to do so effectively, while additionally producing a rich, descriptive account of the field. Adopting a postcolonial feminist ethnography lens, we conducted our fieldwork over a three month period, motivated by a commitment to the indigenous women participants and the development of a reciprocal relationship (Kristin, 2008), while still maintaining a critical approach, thereby affording greater capacity for reflexivity and a space where indigenous women can voice their own understanding of their organised existence (Mohanty, 2003b; Stacey, 1988).

One of us had previous experience working with a social foundation in the highland region of Guatemala, and from this experience empathised with the indigenous Maya women living in this region who are continually challenging discriminating and subjugating practices against them in a patriarchal and ethnically diverse society, within a developing country context. The personal and organisational situations encountered by these women echo the *muted subaltern other* highlighted by Spivak (1988), and thereby provided us with the opportunity to conduct our research in a context where organisational and managerial theories do not make sense. The notion of the *muted subaltern other* encouraged us to approach this research reflexively and ensure the ethnography embraced the approaches of Restrepo and Escobar (2005) and Imas, Wilson

and Weston (2012). We are not speaking for these women, but speaking with them, thereby providing them with a space from which they can speak, while also exposing that ethnocentric Western management and organisation theories cannot speak for indigenous women living in the periphery. Approaching this ethnography reflexively made us aware of our own practices, emotions, biases and experiences, and addressed the subjective nature of this research by continually negotiating complex power relations in the field (Sluka and Robben, 2006; Till, 2009).

We were introduced to the women who participated in this research by a Guatemalan social foundation with which both the women and the researchers had previously worked. Following this, two women's groups agreed to participate: Waqxaqi'Kan ('the eighth weaving day' in Kaqchikel) and Molaj Ixoqi' Artesanas Mayas ('group of Maya artisan women' in K'iche and Spanish). Data collection included immersion in the field by way of living in a predominately indigenous town. Moreover, the majority of each day during the three month fieldwork period was spent with the women of these two groups; this included interviewing them in their homes and observing them while they worked weaving products for business orders, managing the home, and performing the many duties expected of indigenous women. This time was spent building personal relationships with the women and their families, eating meals with them, and attending group meetings with the women whenever they gathered to discuss business. Additionally, data was gathered from meeting with different women from other groups and interviewing a variety of social foundations that work with these groups.

We worked with a local, indigenous female Kaqchikel-K'iche-Spanish-English translator in the field, who became part of the ethnographic research process. While this arrangement presents some limitations, it did not prevent us from developing close,

personal relationships with the women through non-verbal and meta-communication means. Interviews, as well as observations and fieldnotes, were inductive and reflected what the women wanted to share, using their own language, in relation to their work and personal lives. Instead of imposing questions based on colonialist representations defining them and their work (Imas, Wilson and Weston, 2012), we used basic exploratory questions and, in their own words, the women answered who they are and what they do. Overall, through reflexive ethnographic research, we can now speak with these indigenous Maya women and highlight the organisational realities of marginalised women living on the periphery of the global corporate and academic centre.

Narratives of Sololá

The Maya woman can do everything; we cook and do everything in the home. I raised three children alone, managed the home and started the group. I think indigenous women are very strong women. (Antonia Panjoj)

In the highland region of Guatemala's Sololá Department, the back-strap weave is a symbol of life for indigenous Maya women. Living on the margins of society, geographically and economically, Maya women have maintained their cultural identity and resisted colonial changes imposed on them through their continued use of the back-strap weave. These women use the back-strap weave in their homes to make their 'traje' (traditional dress), which is unique to each indigenous community in the Department. The 'traje' is their identity, and, as understood by many of the women, it is their culture; the 'traje', along with their language, is Maya culture. The women of the groups that agreed to participate in this study use their knowledge of weaving to not only make their 'traje' and maintain their cultural identity, but also to make a living.

In sparsely populated rural communities, engulfed in large cornfields, with small 'tiendas' (corner stores) and large churches, indigenous women live in a patriarchal

society, where they often require the permission of their husbands/fathers to leave their home. Many fear leaving because they cannot speak Spanish and have spent their lives in isolated their isolated communities.

Before I was afraid to go out...I never left the home. (Micela Churnel)

Compounded by this is their lack of education. The majority of the women that participated in this research received no education, some received primary education where they learn Spanish and basic numeracy skills, very few progressed on to middle-school, with only a couple having the opportunity to study in diversificado (high-school). As a consequence of colonisation, ethnic discrimination and the Guatemalan civil-war there were very few schools in rural remote indigenous regions. And, like many children in developing countries, particularly during times of conflict, education is sacrificed for vital family income.

I didn't go to school, not even the first grade. (Carmen Raxtum)

I don't even know the alphabet. (Antonia Panjoj)

I was little when my father died...my mother didn't have money to send us to school. When the teacher came here to look for children to send to school, my mother hid all the children from the teacher so we wouldn't be sent to school. ... There was no school in this community, so the teacher would come here looking for children to take with her [to her community]. (Marcela Chiroy)

I had to leave school. My father died when I was 3 years old, I wanted to study, but my mother didn't have the money. ... I worked; my mother told me I had to start weaving and making money. (Dominga Tum Moletz)

Yet, despite their marginality and lack of education, these women came together to find opportunities to sell their back-strap woven products. In the early/mid-1980s, during the height of the Guatemalan Civil War, because many indigenous men from the Sololá Department were 'disappeared', either hiding in the jungle or victims of genocide, their wives, widows and daughters had to find a means to survive. Using their indigenous knowledge these women developed a community enterprise.

There were many widows during and after the war. These women had many necessities, and had to feed their children. (Maria Chiroy)

The women came together to form a group and help themselves. (Micela Churnel)

Out of necessity, these women came together to work in groups and subsequently developed organisations, organisations that do not fit the dominant, Western discourse of management/organisation, but organisations that facilitated their needs and even challenged their cultural norms. There were few groups in this region of Guatemala before the war. Indigenous women did not work outside the home nor did they work together; they only worked in the home and on their land.

There were no women working in groups when I was young. I never heard of it. (Matea Morales)

[People in] the community work by themselves and people work alone. ... In the beginning, people in the community found it very strange that we were working together. (Yolonda Chiroy)

By coming together to utilise their indigenous knowledge and create informal organisations, these women created spaces to self-educate and learn, while also participating in and developing their community. Working in the home and being unable to participate in their community only increased their isolation and marginality. However, the establishment of the group provides a space where women can come together to better themselves and their community, discuss their rights as indigenous women, support each other in the advancement of their numeracy and literacy skills, and improve the quality of their backstrap woven products. The group also provides the only community space encouraging these women to leave their home. The groups were originally established as a means of survival, but have had the unintended beneficial consequence of building confidence and knowledge.

She is different; she knows more now. (Carmen Raxtum's husband)

Now I am going out a lot, and I know more places. I am confident going out, I am not afraid. I know more and I am not afraid to talk. ... I like going out now, but I was very scared at first. When you're in the home you don't learn anything. (Dominga Tum Moletz)

I am more independent. Being in the group has helped me a lot. ... I am acquiring knowledge and learning new things. I get to go out and my sisters only stay in the home. (Micela Churnel)

The groups consist of a variety of women, ranging between 15 and 25 in number. Five are directors and manage the group, with the director positions elected by the group biennially. The directors must dedicate a considerable amount of their time to the group for their two-year term, which work includes contacting buyers, dividing the orders between the women, organising payments and income, arranging group meetings, and ensuring that the women are participating equally within the group. However, in practice, one or two of the most educated women manage the group, whether elected director or not.

[Alicia] is the leader. She does almost everything for the group...No one else in the group is like Alicia or can do the work of Alicia. Some of the women can't read or write, or speak Spanish very well. (Micela Churnel)

I consider myself the co-ordinator of the group because I motivate the group and do most of the work. ... I am not a director. (Flori Cuy)

None of the directors, or any of the women in the group, are paid members or employees; they only earn income from the individual products they make per order they receive. Moreover, all of the women work from home. Working from home plays an important part in indigenous women's organisation. The indigenous woman's responsibility in the home takes precedence over her participation in the group. By producing orders and making products in her home, these indigenous women are not neglecting their duties to their husbands, children, dependent parents and home, which includes, for example, hand-washing all the families clothes every day, cooking all meals

using basic raw ingredients, basic cooking utensils and wood fires (taking approximately two hours per meal), looking after the family's animals, etc.

The women will not work from the centre; they only want to work from home. (Micela Churnel)

Working from home is important for me and the group because this way I can be with my family and take care of my [special-needs] brother and mother. And for the other women it's important for them to be in the home to take care of their children and husbands. (Marcela Chiroy)

The women never work together. They only meet if they have received an order, or payment for an order, that needs to be divided (always equally) between them, or they want to discuss the progress and development of the group. Meetings take a long time and often start late; the women have to ensure their responsibilities in the home are taken care of before attending. Moreover, because the women do not often have the opportunity to leave their home, and there are no social activities in their communities, group meetings provide a space for the women to socialise and be free from the responsibilities of the home.

[The group] is a special place because you get to go out...you're not stuck in the house doing the chores of the home all day. (Marcela Chiroy)

One of the many consequences of living on the periphery is remoteness, and these indigenous women have addressed this through their engagement with social organisations. The groups originally sold products through informal market stalls in tourist locations and supplying to tourist shops; however, the groups now receive large, albeit irregular, product orders from these organisations, which are then sold on the international fair trade market. Another important aspect of indigenous women's organisation is their relationship to these social organisations. Through their engagement with these organisations, the women have developed personally through education and training programmes, for example, numerical and literacy classes, and women's rights

programmes provided by younger and more educated indigenous women. Additionally, their groups have developed, for example, these organisations registered the groups as associations, provide the women with international design, colour and fashion demonstrations, and leadership training programmes. As there was, and is, no government support for the women or their groups, they have come to depend on their relationship with these social organisations as a means of personal and professional development.

They [social organisation] give the group different and new knowledge.
(Marcela Chiroy)

We are more knowledgeable because we attend many training programmes and we go out and learn new things. (Rosa Parabal)

The government doesn't recognise our work or support our work...or [the work of] the groups. (José Victor Pop Bol, Aj Quen)

The women and their organisations live and operate on the periphery of society and mainstream organisation. Despite their marginality, they have developed alternative ways of organising that represent them and respect their culture. This means of organising provides them with a space not only for economic progression, but personal and social development. Moreover, how these women act and enact their organisation practices demonstrates that indigenous Maya women should not be assumed as victims, but as empowered leaders achieving emancipatory experiences.

We know our rights and now we have a place [the group] where we can express ourselves. We have a voice now. (Micela Churnel)

Conclusions

Our research highlights the emancipatory experience of these women, asserting their desire of being heard. It also points out the relevancy of re-defining gender issues in organisation within a more inclusive agenda that encompasses the experiences of these

marginalised women. That is, they bring to the discussion in organisation studies and management awareness on what Mohanty (1988) regards as feminists critiques dominated by theories and praxis that implicitly reflect 'Western' constructs of women. Our study takes into consideration Mohanty's view. Having said that, we are aware that by being Western we do represent a problem in the re-presentation and discussion of these women as the 'Other' (Alcoff, 1991). Yet, we are also aware that by neglecting and ignoring their voices, the contribution this kind of study can make to organisation and management is extremely limited. Therefore, rather than doing nothing and continue to leave these women voiceless, in our own struggle to decolonise our thoughts (and the readers), we consider to be the outmost relevant to present their stories here.

Our research suggests that these co-operatives act as alternative spaces for indigenous women in Guatemala, empowering as well as enhancing their participation in employment in a fair and democratic way. That is, their experiences may resonate with similar communities in the rest of Latin America, Africa or Asia, and even with the most impoverished ones of the European south.

What we need to be protective of is the knowledge produce from these women's experiences. This knowledge is an exercise in communal participation that enhances our appreciation in the West of the creativity and the vitality these women provide. This cannot be excluded, neglected, ignored so that it can benefit, transcending the knowledge barriers we impose in our academic settings. By committing ourselves to this kind of research, we hope we illuminate and create bridges of dialogue, knowledge and understanding, breaking the Euro-centrism of our subject and interweaving their narratives with ours. Thus, their narratives are not heard as marginalised or separated but part of, and a part of us all.

In sum, our contribution comes from the desire to share these experiences in order to give voice and alter the way in which we understand the narrative of management/organisation (in the Western epistemological and ontological sense) from indigenous women experiences. These Maya women, who are constantly fighting and challenging discriminatory and subjugating practices against them within a patriarchal and ethnically diverse society, show with dignity and courage a different language upon which we may start re-writing and re-interpreting what we understand by organising processes, by the meaning of organisation.

As Mohanty (2003a, p.530) would say, we no longer live simply under the gaze of Western eyes. We also live inside it and negotiate it every day. We make our homes in Dublin or London, but always as from Sololá, Guatemala. Our work takes us “to interconnected places and communities around the world—to a struggle contextualized by women of colour and of the Third World, sometimes located in the Two-Thirds World, sometimes in the One-Third. So the borders here are not really fixed. Our minds must be as ready to move as capital is, to trace its paths and to imagine alternative destinations”.

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